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STEUN
Met steun van de talloze vrijwilligers, adverteer-
ders en de Vlaamse Gemeenschap



WOORD VOORAF:

Het ministerie van Liefde - opgedragen aan mijn vrienden van Ruis

Het werd opnieuw een escapistische zomer. Tijdens de avonden van stevig doordrinken, satanische lachjes, psychedelische eenden en marshmallows herontdekten we Moeder Natuur, de enige autoriteit waar we met diep respect voor buigen. We kozen volop voor de extase in romantische weiden en hoge duinen. Het was tijdens zo'n avond aan de Blaarmeersen, we waren aan het reflecteren over het *Reservoir met de ballen in totaal evenwicht* van Jeff Koons, dat we onverwacht gezelschap kregen van een groepje jongeren, nog niet in staat tot diepe reflectie, onderdanig aan Narcissus en stijf van de statusangst. Ze vergezelden een vrolijke jarige die, na het vaginaal inbrengen van enkele wodkaampons en het snuiven van flesjes acrylnitriet, behoorlijk dicht in de buurt kwam van de essentie van het leven. Afgunst overviel me. Had ik dan niet een halve lever en behoorlijk wat hersencellen moeten opofferen voor hetzelfde inzicht? Maar mijn afgunst maakte snel plaats voor onbegrip toen haar luidruchtig machogezelschap, volgesnoven met morele superioriteit, de jarige aan de schandpaal nagelde. Schande en ontucht! De Betrunkentheidspolizei aan het werk.

Dergelijk doorgedreven competitief individualisme is dodelijk voor échte vriendschap, gevrijwaard van alle ego. Dit alles wordt verpersoonlijkt door de commentatoren van het web. Ooit begonnen door een stel seksverslaafde, anonieme trollen is hun gedrag getransformeerd naar de nieuwe norm van het Sociale Ideaal. De anonieme, haatdragende eikels hebben dankzij Facebook Connect nu ook een échte naam en een waarheidsgetrouwe profielfoto. Iedereen mag weten dat Cercle lover, papa van enkele kids, weleens mensen uitscheldt, pest en digitaal verminkt. Een peer-to-peer, gedistribueerd totalitair systeem. Niet gecontroleerd door een centrale partij of een brok technologie maar door elkaar. Met een iPhone 5 in de hand capteren de paparazzi field recordings en terrabytes fotomateriaal. Met het ultieme doel: onze eigen morele superioriteit verheffen boven die van de andere medemens. User generated pek en veren. Niemand meer in staat tot liefde.

Spotify spuugt een neonazistische fuzzband door luidsprekers die in mijn scherm zijn ingebouwd. Het klinkt niet zo vol als Apples nieuwe EarPods maar het valt mee. Misschien zit daar wel een update in. Ik bedenk me echter, neonazi's scoren nooit echt meer dan 10 likes. Bovendien is dit een partyruis, een ode aan de extase en verbroedering van jaren échte vriendschap. Ik heb namelijk een erfelijke ziekte. Mijn vader gaf me, naast een stevige appetijt voor sterke drank en de behoefte om geliefd te worden, ook het gemuteerd gen dat mijn cannabinoid receptoren codeert. Daardoor ben ik 34 keer sneller stoned dan de gemiddelde mens. Mijn maten noemen me wel eens Pierre Rapstoned. Al lachend, want vrienden vellen geen oordeel en bekladden elkaar niet me pek en veren. Tot een Narcotics Anonymous confrontatie zal het heus niet komen, daarvoor is de rest van mijn leven ogenschijnlijk probleemloos. Ik ben een CEO, opgeklommen op de ladder van kapitalisme. Ik ruilde mij PVDA-lidkaart voor een zetel in diverse raden van bestuur. Met mijn wekelijks salaris koop ik de originele persingen van de volledige Acid Archives. Kortom, ik ben iemand die voldoet aan de maatschappelijke criteria van succes. In tegenstelling tot Pico Coppens, Gijs Van Hoecke en de lieve jarige met de wodkaampons blijf ik gespaard van confrontaties. De enige confrontatie is die met het depressief genot, samen met mijn vrienden van Ruis.

Hendrik Dacquín

When Brion Gysin tried to enter the art world as a young surrealist painter, the gods were not exactly on his side. After being rejected by André Breton at an exhibition at the Parisian Galerie Quatre Chemins in 1935, which featured all the maestros of his time, a difficult career as an artistic outsider lay ahead. It was not until his encounter with William Burroughs in Tangier in the fifties and his later residence at the infamous 'Beat Hotel' that his work started influencing a new generation of experimentalists'. His cut-up techniques and so-called 'permutation poems' marked a new beginning and have spun a web of mysticism around the artist. Although Gysin's new literary discoveries were heavily indebted to the work of the Dadaists and his predecessor's ideas about automatic writing, his contribution to a neo-avantgarde that developed new views in a modernist tradition cannot be underestimated. Still, scholarly attention has remained minimal. Most of the information about Gysin and his work comes through the study of his friend, the by far more popular author, William Burroughs. In this essay I would like to look into the meaning of Gysin's cut-ups, permutations and sound poetry within the conception of modernism in the fifties and sixties, when art became much more entangled in popular culture. I will discuss these three literary forms separately and try to relate them to a dualistic understanding of the concept 'noise'. - *Stief Marreyt*

The Modernist poetry of

BRION GYSIN



POETRY OF THE MODERNIST GYSIN BRION

GYSIN AS A MODERNIST

As it is often argued, the term 'modernism' is more of a cultural-historical feature to classify certain genres and new evolutions in a historical context than it is a rigid theoretic concept². Modernism can therefore be seen as an amalgam of heterogenic qualities that can be applied to many innovative artists until late in the twentieth century. It is nevertheless often used to indicate the radical urge of artists in the past century to be innovative on different levels, to find new ways to express or react against new socio-historical circumstances. Gysin can be classified as a modernist in two ways: as the young 'epigone' and, more importantly, as the later innovative cult artist.

Gysin's interest in contemporary literature and visual arts started early.. He read Joyce's *Ulysses* at age seventeen and developed an interest in abstract painting already in public school. He also started writing around that same age, studied modernist poetry and was determined to become an artist. After he had moved to Paris in 1934 he frequented the salons where he was presented as a young poet. He was introduced to Natalie Barney and Alice B. Toklas (whom he would later famously send a cannabis fudge recipe for her cookbook). Despite his dwelling in the right artistic circles at the right time and writing and painting in the vein of the early modernist elite, his career did not pull off well. He was often rejected for publication or criticized for being too manneristic³. He nevertheless contributed a body of work in which he both questioned an old way of thinking and representing, and searched for his own language within this tradition. That he was thoroughly influenced by the surrealists, the Dadaists, the Cubists et cetera and that he could not initially amaze fellow-artists or the public with an authentic voice in these early years, is another story. Gysin left Paris for New York and it was not until he returned to Paris in 1958, following a long stay in Tangier, that the story of the man as an influential modernist artist begins to take shape.

While still maintaining an experimental approach in the late fifties, most of the radical innovations in the art world had happened while and even before he entered it. A lot had changed since then, another world war had taken place. Nevertheless, it was in the fifties and sixties that he realized his most productive and groundbreaking work. Trying to get a grip on the term modernism, this causes difficulties, since it is hard to defend the same interpretation for both periods. In the introduction to *Pop Modernism. Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* Juan A. Suárez sketches a general outline for an understanding of Modernism in which artistic and popular culture interact. He writes:

*The modernists often regarded metropolitan environments, the iconography of the media, and mass produced commodities as agents of oppression, but used creatively, they could open up emancipating styles of being and doing. In this way, modernists insistently addressed one of the central contradictions of modernity: the fact that the mass-production of everyday life ended up generating a fragmentary, leaky reality that was as inescapable as it was uncontrollable, a reality endowed with vastly increased possibilities for micrological manipulation at the level of daily tactics – consumption, the reception of images and sounds, the engagement with objects, and the uses of space.*⁴

The 'defamiliarization of the quotidian', as Suárez calls it, is exactly the effect of Gysin's new poetry. This can also be said of the iconic texts of Mallarmé, Apollinaire en Tristan Tzara which all appeared prior to 1925. Gysin was well aware of this. He met Tzara around the time word about cut-up experiments spread. When Tzara asked him why these youngsters should cover the ground that was already covered

by the Dadaists in 1920, Gysin answered: 'Perhaps they feel you did not cover it thoroughly enough'⁵. Tzara made a valuable argument, but the context of the experiments had changed, which directly implies a different consequence, a different framework in which the work had to be interpreted. The fifties, with its aggressive expansion of media, information and noise made it harder to translate or to interpret the general goings-on, and brought modernist techniques to new extremes. The tension between the neo-avantgarde and the historical avantgarde has been discussed by different critics and interpreted in both positive and negative terms. Peter Bürger's influential work *Theorie der Avantgarde* (1974) sees the post-war vanguard as an uninspired retake on the historical avant-garde. Hal Foster and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, on the other hand, developed a more positive interpretation. In his *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* Buchloh says:

*The first of Bürger's many delusions was of course to situate the neo-avantgarde practices in a perpetual, almost Oeidal relation to the accomplishments of the parental avant-garde of the twenties. Rather than recognizing that the failure of the generation of the parents in political and historical terms, not in artistic ones, would have to provide the framework from which to rethink the conditions of whether and how culture could be reconceived after the Second World War, Bürger insisted on gauging all activities of the postwar moment against the artistic accomplishments of the historical avant-garde.*⁶

The political failure is also the core of Gysin's critique on the Surrealist Group. He described the group as "the first to turn an art movement into a terrorist political party"⁷. On a historical level, his work functions necessarily in relation to the parental movement, but transcends the time discussion on an artistic level, not only by being aware of the methods he was working with, but also by applying them in a new temporal context. Hal Foster writes in his *Return to the Real* that Bürger goes beyond the fact that the status of the historical avant-garde 'is a retroactive effect of countless artistic responses and critical readings, and so it goes across the dialogical space-time of avant-garde practice and institutional reception'⁸.

Apart from this dichotomy of the avant-garde, Foucault's approach to language, which regards literature as a reaction against every attempt to make language 'conceptually transparent', seems well fit to analyze Gysin's work. Foucault sees literature as the 'being of language', a phrase to mark that it can only be experienced in its 'materiality, alterity or exteriority'⁹. In his essay *The Thought of the Outside*¹⁰ the event of literature is described as 'no longer discourse and the communication of meaning, but a spreading forth of language in its raw state, an unfolding of pure exteriority'¹¹. This materialistic tendency is a general idea that can be applied to the work of both Modernist avant-gardes. Both movements tried to detach the form from the content. The idea stresses an illogical being, a breaking loose from everything outside itself, the pure product of writing. This implies that any direct political, philosophical or other relationship between the material work and the extraliterary context is absent, whatever the initial incentive. This is easier to defend in the case of Gysin than it is for many of the historical avant-gardists. In a post World War II society, the artistic impulses that still endorsed the 'make it new' ideology were much less grounded in a craving for political change than they were in a sphere of complete disillusionment. As a result, most of Gysin's literary experiments in the fifties and sixties were detached from anything extra-textual, not primarily to breach existing systems, but rather to develop a language that frees itself. This might not be radically different from earlier modernists whose agendas did not explicitly come forward in their work, still this approach makes it easier for the reader to focus on the core of the aesthetic which is freed from extratextual auras. Especially the experiments in which the cut-up techniques and the permutations are transferred to recording devices are particularly interesting in this regard, since they include an isolation of voice and/or noise, reducing them to their poetic origins.

CUT-UPS

The classic story of the cut-ups, as it was told by Gysin and Burroughs, was that one day in 1959 Gysin was cutting a mount for a drawing and accidentally sliced through a pile of newspapers that were lying underneath. Gysin randomly pieced together the fragments of text that appeared and discovered he had found a new collage technique, 'a painter's technique for writing'. Presenting the work to Burroughs, he was well amazed. The rest is Beat history.¹²

These first cut-ups were published in 1960 in *Minutes to Go*, a book he co-authored with Burroughs, Sinclair Beiles and Gregory Corso. The poems featured the quality of random enchantments, compiled out of nowhere, and with a quality of modern shamanism. Later in *Let the Mice in*, Gysin would come up with the often quoted sentences: "The poets are supposed to liberate the words – not chain them in phrases. Who told the poets they were supposed to think? Poets are meant to sing and to make words sing. Writers don't own their words. Since when do words belong to anybody? 'Your very own words,' indeed! And who are you?"¹³

The cut-ups use and rearrange text that has already been written, and rely on collage ideas that already had been invented. It is a poetics of deconstructed quotation and a precursor to a digital copy-paste and sampling age. In the sixties, though, this detachment of words from the individual writer was interpreted as something magic. The cut-ups had the effect of a spell. Gysin's persona only contributed to such an interpretation. His long stay in Morocco and friendship with the mystic troupe of The Master Musicians of Jajouka, his open defence of drug use, the invention of the dreamachine¹⁴ and his interest in Scientology, Hassan-I Sabbah and occultism in general only supported these readings. Furthermore, the cut-ups are lauded more as an invention of technique than for the actual practice. It was William Burroughs who actually consistently put this technique into practice, promoted it and later became famous for its execution. In an interview with Victor Bockris in 1977 Burroughs praised Gysin's montage method as being 'much closer to the facts of actual human perception than representational writing, which represents cows-in-the-grass painting'.¹⁵ For the writers related to the Beat Generation the montage method was a literary means to catch up with modern reality. The technique represented their schizophrenic, paranoid and hallucinogenic take on the world, a world that was turbulent of its own, but only radicalized in their escapism through sex and drug use. This type of poetry was based on the act of creating, of working with language as matter. It was not only closer to perception of reality, but a part of that reality. The cut-ups helped building and reordering reality by illustrating the diversity of textual substance, new possibilities to handle it and the relativity of meaning. Moreover, by using texts from newspapers as well as canonized literary works, they helped eliminating boundaries between high and low culture. It also meant that with their work Gysin and Burroughs subscribed to and rejected the everyday life at the same time. They used its matter and valued it for its simple origins, but they transformed it at the same time to enter a next level. In the recycled combination of the vulgar ready-made and the elevated cultural product, the cut-ups showed analogy with modern society. They were a culturalized form of what Suárez calls noise. He writes: 'Modernism and the everyday life of modernity were actually full of noise: not only the clang of machinery and the din of traffic [...] but also occurrences and recesses that simply refused to yield sense'.¹⁶ This will become even

more explicit in the experiments with tape machines, when the notion 'noise' is adapted to a medium that seems more fit for it. They would then use the material medium in function of dematerializing the message and reaching a peculiar transcendence.

PERMUTATED POEMS

Around the same time as he was working on the cut-ups, Gysin also began to write so-called 'permutated poems'. He was first confronted with the possibilities of permutations after having read the divine tautology 'I am that I am' in an appendix to a work of Aldous Huxley. Hating the rigidity of the formula and the lack of symmetric quality, he changed it to 'I am that am I'. Fooling around with the words he soon discovered that variations of e.g. six word sentences could lead up to 720 different versions.¹⁷

I AM THAT I AM
AM I THAT I AM
I THAT AM I AM
THAT I AM I AM
AM THAT I I AM
THAT AM I I AM
I AM I THAT AM
AM I I THAT AM
I I AM THAT AM
I I AM THAT AM
AM I I THAT AM
...

As with the cut-ups, these permutations also had a mantric quality. The repetitive strain of words in different orders resembles spiritual chants. They become an ecstatic echo of each other. In that way an overload of meaning ultimately results in meaninglessness. It becomes another form of noise.

First of all, these poems were the result of pure wordplay and experiment in rhythm. Whereas the cut-ups were deconstructing traditional meaning by shuffling existing text, the permutations elaborated on simple sentences, deconstructing its syntax in order not so much to confuse but to propose other ways of reading, seeing and later, hearing. As with the dreamachine, Gysin wanted to create experiences of an 'altered state', and all possible ways to enter this state were welcome. This aim was precursory to a counterculture and, later in the sixties, a popular youth culture, for which this mind expansion would become a main concern. The permutated poems were a quest for poetic freedom. It was a straightforward claim, stripped from any symbolism, metaphors or intellectual framework. One of the permutations simply goes: 'I've come to free the words / come to free thee / words come to free/ words come too to free the words / come to free the words / come to the free words/ ...'¹⁸

The permutations can be interpreted as an elaboration on early modernist formal experiments – Gysin was no doubt familiar with Gertrude Stein's iconic 'Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose'. Despite a shared interest in rhythm and everyday speech, the poems denote something completely different from e.g. Stein's line in 'Sacred Emily'. The permutations stress neither exactitude nor a poetic claim to modern representation. On the contrary, they lay bare a multitude of possibilities in the simplest form of language. It is useless to figure out the different possible meanings per line, as one could easily do with 'Rose is a rose...'. Things are not what they are in these poems, but what you want them to be. These poems evoke a kaleidoscopic effect: a constant movement in shape, linguistic matter that constantly merges into itself in different forms. They present language as raw image and sound to be experienced as a whole, as a sign itself. The poem becomes a drone and finally disconnects the reader from the material components, to become a synaesthetic vision.

SOUND POETRY

When arriving in Paris at a young age, Gysin's main occupation was painting, and in spite of his literary inventions, throughout his life he has always devoted equal or maybe even more attention to the visual arts. Gysin is an early example of the contemporary multi- and intermedia artist, building an oeuvre in which words, calligraphy, film, painting, sound, light art, et cetera constantly interchange and interfere. When discovering the cut-up and permutation method it was only a logical step to start experimenting with audio devices.

In his early days at the Beat Hotel Gysin bought a small reel-to-reel recorder and started recording his poems and the environment. The sonorized permutations drew the attention of French sound poetry pioneer Bernard Heidsieck, and he was invited by him and Henri Chopin to do a performance at the experimental Parisian showcase Le Domaine Poétique. Later he was also invited at The BBC Radiophonic Workshop and towards the end of his career he worked with different musicians such as Steve Lacy to combine efforts in poetry and jazz.¹⁹

Few of Gysin's early recordings have survived, and again it was Burroughs who would extensively adopt his techniques. A remarkable early realisation is Gysin's 'Poem of Poems', of which he said he made it to show Burroughs how to use the tape machine.²⁰ The method is similar to the paper cut ups. Reels were cut and randomly pasted together again. Gysin recorded his own voice reading sentences and made a tape collage of this. The result is far from shocking. But interestingly, between each of the cut pieces there is a noise on the recording, of the tape head playing the part where the reel is pasted. These noises interrupt the flow of the audio poem. Compared to the printed version, this sound poetry is more direct but it cannot establish the same mantric spell. On the other hand it is a clear indication of materiality. The listener is immediately confronted with the method and the medium. The noise of the everyday enters the poem in a concrete way. It is the unsignifying reality of the device, a typically modernist approach of Gysin to let this be a part of the whole. The urge for a romantic and ideal beauty has faded away; the art practice lives inside the real. Things are presented as they are. This leads to a paradox that is present in Gysin's entire oeuvre: the materiality and the unsignified are stressed in function of a transcendence of the everyday. The conflict between these two extremes increases the impact of noise and results in an unbearable distortion. Suárez relates noise to the madness and the mental breakdowns in the works he analyzes:

After all, mental breakdown is the result of sensory overload, and madness is the perception-consciousness apparatus working on fast-forward, pursuing connections, chance and inarticulate matter for their own sake, disregarding sense and the protocols of the socialized subject. When this is not madness, it is modernism, but it is not easy to tell them apart.²¹

This can be nicely illustrated by the tension between the works of art and the biographical repercussions they had on the artists. Burroughs was famously known for thinking these machines had spirits, Gysin started recording a swimming pool and again making noise the subject of his work. The recording obsession and the confrontation with noise as a matter of art, fitted neatly in their interest for the spiritual. They thought their intense bond invoked a third mind, and started questioning themselves in the same way as they questioned language and poetry. In the online essay for RealityStudio Ian Macfadyen writes:

Material processes, the technology of tape machines and projectors and cameras was employed against itself, to confute the mental and physical, the subjective and objective, the natural and supernatural... They would become spirit-seers, and steal the ghosts from those machines — they'd make them their own slave servos.²²

*The Pool K III*²³ recordings of the swimming pool tempts the listener to hear something supernatural in it. In fact, what Gysin does here, is making a very early piece of sound poetry that is now known as field recording or sound art, i.e. the recording of spatiality as art. Again, the tension between the unsignified and extrareality is foregrounded. Noise reaches the listener on a subrational level. The noise of modernity and the noise of modernism coexist, or equal each other. It is the subliminal message of reality caught on tape.

CONCLUSION

*Gysin steal the ghosts could be interpreted as an elaboration
Stripped from the free words from the contrary poetic claim
When the notion noise in which words building with the mystic troupe
is the unsignifying reality. Voice reading sentences ecstatic echo
To the paper at a young age and rejected many times*

Far from the public spotlights and determined to become a cult figure, Brion Gysin contributed to a late modernist scene of neo-avantgardists with his new literary techniques and innovative sound poetry. Although preceded by the Dadaist movement of the early twentieth century he took the collage method to a new level, introduced new formal methods and created a new artistic language in which materiality and transcendentality are in constant debate.

*Noise of modernism interchange the classic story
Chemins in 1935 in that way an overload of meaning schizophrenic,
paranoid but it cannot establish the same mantric spell
the tape head playing the part the part tape head playing the
head part playing the tape part head tape the playing
Hating the rigidity another form of noise
things are not what they are*

The tremendous urge for movement within a society that showed both signs of prosperity and disillusionment is translated well in Gysin's work. As much as he was an artist he was a researcher and a creative inventor. His experimental approach to art and matter in general did not lead to his celebration as an artist in the first place, but did influence some younger poets in the midst of a rapidly changing environment and reached them instruments to embrace modernity, and even more, modernism.

Spirit-seers caught on tape
Recording of spatiality
Where the reel is pasted poems were a quest
of the man as an influential Modernist a third mind in rhythm*

TWEE KLANK

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Thierry Müller

FR

Aaron Moore

UK

Floris Vanhoof

BE

Nathalie Forget

FR

Brecht Ameel

BE

Daniel Padden

UK

Moemlien

DE

Miaux

BE

L'Idée
Bertold Bartosch
25'54" / 1932

Prometheus Garden
Bruce Bickford
28' / 1988

The Ancient Set
Steven Claydon
7'43" / 2009

¹ Geiger 2005

² Bruns 2005, 348-349

³ Geiger 2005

⁴ Suárez 2007, 6

⁵ Geiger 2005, 132

⁶ Buchloch 2000, XXIV

⁷ in 'Thoughts on Surrealists' on the cd Mektoub: Recordings 1960-1981, Perditiion Plastics, 1996

⁸ Foster 1996, 8

⁹ Bruns 2005, 356

Original title: *La pensée du dehors* ¹⁰

¹¹ Foucault 1998, 148

¹² Geiger 2005, 128-129

¹³ Weiss 2001, 132

¹⁴ The dreammachine is a construction in the form of a spinning cylinder, with a light bulb inside and a surrounding pattern of openings to create alpha waves and produce a drugless 'high'. Gysin tried to market this invention, but as with many of his projects it ultimately failed to become successful.

¹⁵ Bockris 1996, 6

¹⁶ Suárez 2007, 8

¹⁷ Geiger 2005, 137

¹⁸ This is a personal transcription of the vocal poem on the Perditiion Plastics Mektoub: Recordings 1960-1981 compilation cd (1996). The actual manuscript might differ from this.

¹⁹ Geiger 2005

²⁰ liner notes Brion Gysin – Poem of Poems LP, Alga Marghen, 1997

²¹ Suárez 2007, 11

²² Macfadyen 2011

²³ <http://www.ubu.com/sound/gysin.html>

* this essay was an exam paper for dr. Sarah Posman's Modernism class at UGent

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27.10.12
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HoGent KASK CONSERVATORIUM **KRAAK**

VERGETEN PLAAT



Jim Sullivan 'U.F.O.' (Monnie Records, 1970)

Afscheid nemen van Piet Ruis en zijn blad valt me zwaar. Ik zou kunnen kiezen voor een simpele knuffel en wat gezwaai. Of voor een radicale fugue. Maar nog liever word ik het slachtoffer van een *good old alien abduction*. Dit overkwam Jim Sullivan, maker van deze Vergeten Plaat, of dat beweerde hij zelf toch. In maart 1975 verdween Jim plotsklaps in New Mexico. Zijn Volkswagen Kever werd verlaten teruggevonden en zijn geboekte motelkamer bleek niet beslapen te zijn. Het mysterie werd nooit opgelost en allerlei wilde verhalen begonnen de ronde te doen: hij liep verloren in de woestijn, hij werd het slachtoffer van een lokale maffiabende en hij werd door buitenaardse wezens ontvoerd.

Als bij toeval heette z'n eerste langspeler *U.F.O.* Dat debuut werd uitgebracht op een kleine oplage als private persing. Wat er ook van zij, feit is dat de teksten die Sullivan in 1970 schreef, plots vreselijk accuraat werden vijf jaar na datum. Het nummer 'Highway' bijvoorbeeld kon het verhaal zijn van zijn laatste rit van Los Angeles naar New Mexico. Tijdens die rit werd Sullivan tegengehouden door de politie omdat hij al zigzaggend over het asfalt gleed. In het dorpje Santa Rosa werd hij naar een motel verwezen. Daar zou hij zijn auto achterlaten met zijn gitaar, portefeuille, opnames en een doos van zijn eigen lp's.

De muzikanten op dit album zijn (verder onbekende) sessiemuzikanten die speelden voor The Beach Boys, Sinatra, The Mamas & The Papas en Phil Spector. Hun namen: drummer Earl Palmer, toetsenist Don Randi en bassist Jimmy Bond. Die laatste schreef ook de arrangementen én produceerde Sullivans debuutplaat. Jimmy Bond speelde duizenden sessies met bekende muzikanten, zoals Randy Newman en Nina Simone, maar hij herinnerde zich nauwelijks iets van de bewuste opnames met Sullivan, noch van Jim Sullivan zelf. Toen hem werd gevraagd naar

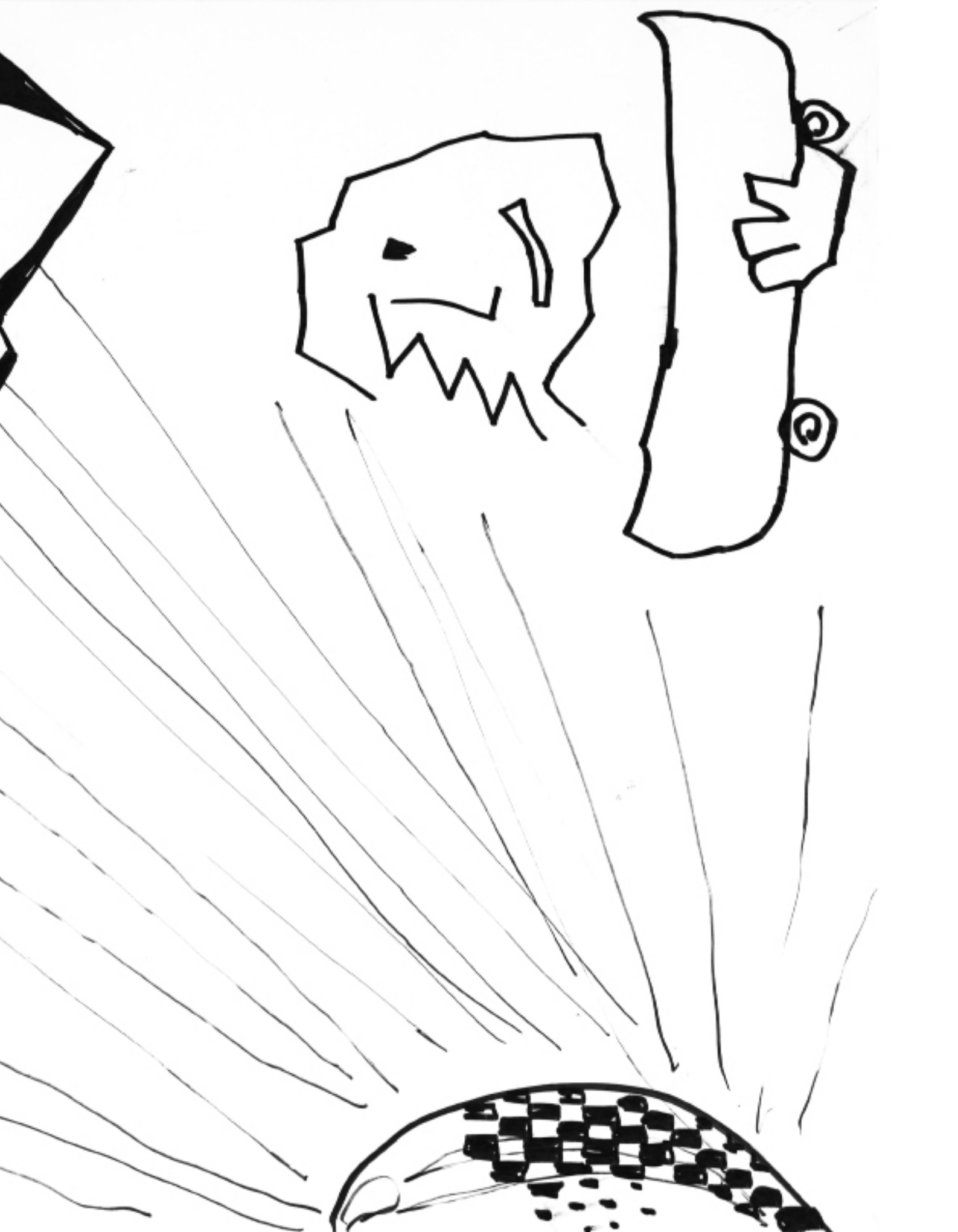
bepaalde voorvallen, kon hij zich werkelijk niets meer voor de geest halen. Totdat iemand hem de opnames nog eens liet horen. Na een dertigtal seconden werd de man plots helemaal teruggekatapulteerd naar het jaar 1970! Hij kon herinneringen ophalen aan de opnamestudio en diste een paar details uit die tijd op.

De arrangementen van bassist Bond doen denken aan het betere werk van David Axelrod. Je hoort ook mooie donkere strijkers, die perfect gemixt zijn met luide drums en warme rollende bassen. Je zou Serge Gainsbourg en zijn arrangeur Jean-Claude Vannier ook kunnen noemen als referentie, maar vergeleken met hen is de muziek van Sullivan eerder doorspekt met blues- en folkmotieven.

Toen Sullivan bijna dagelijks in Los Angeles optrad, liet hij zich steeds omringen door een schare fans. Dat waren mensen die zelf uit de showbusiness afkomstig waren en die hem ten zeerste apprecieerden en zijn opnames bovendien financierden. Dat is meteen ook de reden waarom bekendere en dus ook duurdere sessiemuzikanten meespeelden op Sullivans debuut. *U.F.O.* werd eerst uitgebracht als private persing op Monnie Records en later op Century City. Die laatste uitgeverij zou het werk releasen zonder de prachtige strijkersarrangementen waardoor de plaat veel van haar sfeer verloor.

Het geluid van *U.F.O.* is dat van een gevoelige ziel. Het is een persoonlijke luisterervaring die je diep raakt. Ideaal voer voor een eindeloze roadtrip, met de blik op meerkleurige zonnestrallen. Ik droom, stop de wagen en loop de woestijn in.







EPILOOG **Stefan Hopmans**

Maand na maand was
dit dat was. Ik schreef,
U las. Uw oog gleed
al mijn zinnen af, die
de samenhang door
braken. Smaak vormt
de grootste horde,
naast het menselijk

begrip. Wat door de
mazen glipt, zwemt
in een grenzeloze zee.
Maanvis trekt de stro-
ming mee. Mola mola.
Zee o zee. O melo-
die. O ieder woord
op dit papier is maar

een noot. Mare mare.
Ademnood. De dren-
keling klinkt schor. Zijn
keel is droog. De zee
zwijgt als hij zingt. Do
re mi fa sol. Do rescue
my soul. Onder de gol-
ven on dort o soleil.

TOP 6

Jeroen Wille (1982) is een gevierd muziek- en lettertypeconnaisseur uit Gent. Hij is grafisch ontwerper bij Studio Luc De Rycke en oprichter van het Gentse audioMER label. Als levenskunstenaar met een sterk Dionysische persoonlijkheid geldt hij naast een topambachtsman ook als een unieke figuur binnen het Vlaamse kunstenveld. In deze top 6 presenteert Wille enkele albums uit zijn collectie die de tand des tijds hebben doorstaan.

Noise - Tenno LP (ALM Records, 1980)

Noise was een Japanse improvisatiegroep die eind jaren zeventig en begin jaren tachtig actief was. Die groep bestond uit onder andere Tori en Reiko Kudo, nog steeds de kern van hun tegenwoordige groep Maher Shalal Hash Baz. De Tenno LP is zo'n zeldzaam unicum dat volledig op zich staat en klinkt alsof het niet anders klinken kon. Het album begint met een orgel en ijlde Japanse gezangen, die steeds overstuurder beginnen te klinken naar het eind van het nummer toe. Andere nummers zijn dan weer naïefer en eenvoudiger in aanpak. Over de context van dit album is weinig terug te vinden, laat staan de drijfveren, maar dit hoeft ook niet: gewoon luisteren en telkens nieuwe elementen ontdekken!

Gurdjieff - Improvisations - Dubbel CD (Basta, 3091 152, 2004)

Deze dubbelcd kwam met het boek 'Harmonic Development – The Complete Harmonium Recordings 1948–49' (Aalsmeer: Basta, 2004). Wat de man tijdens zijn leven allemaal te vertellen had, ontgaat me wat. De muziek op deze compilatie is echter heel fascinerend. De cd's bevatten harmonium improvisaties van Gurdjieff. Deze miniatuurtjes werden opgenomen in het Wellington Hotel in New York, rond de nieuwjaarsperiode van 1948–1949. Veel variatie bezitten de opnames niet, maar ze ademen een heel intieme sfeer uit. Het muzikale aspect wordt afgewisseld met opnames waarin Gurdjieff iets vertelt of een grapje maakt, wat het intieme karakter alleen maar versterkt. Muzikaal stukken beter dan de gemiddelde 'Bullshit Boring Drone Band'. En voor wie er maar niet genoeg van krijgt: het boek bevat ook een extra CD-rom met 136 mp3's die garant staan voor uren luistergenot.

Roland Kayn - Multiplex Sound-Art (Requiem pour Patrice Lumumba / Composizione AD / Prismes Reflectes) - Dubbel CD (Reiger-records-reeks, KY-CD 004-1/2, 2004)

Persoonlijk kan ik maar niet genoeg krijgen van de man zijn muziek. Helaas krijgt hij postuum nog altijd niet de erkenning die hij verdient. Roland Kayns 'cybernetische' muziek is met weinig anders te vergelijken. De muziek bevat geen ritme, melodie, of al te narratieve elementen. Het is alsof de muziek zichzelf stuurt. Desondanks die koele omschrijving is het toch heel mooi en ontroerend luisteren. Je wordt ondergedompeld en meegevoerd door klanken die zichzelf lijken uit te vinden. Als dit 'the audio-world of the future' is, zoals op sommige van zijn albums staat, dan leef ik maar al te graag in 2203.



Jessica Rylan / Can't - You Don't Get To Live - CD box (IRFP, irfp13, 2005)

Een box die alle IRFP (IRFP was het label van Jessica Rylan) releases van de femme fatale van de noise verzamelt. Dit is een fantastische collectie die na 7 jaar nog steeds fris en eigenzinnig klinkt. Weinig andere noise maakt me zo vrolijk als het beluisteren van dit. Haar schriftuur, tekeningen en soms wel eens een liefdesbrief waarmee haar releases gepaard gaan, maken het allemaal dubbel persoonlijk. Een verademing tussen de doodgekauwde iconografie van seriemoordenaars, bondageperformances of nazisymboliek, waarmee een noiserelease wel eens gepaard kan gaan. Vorig jaar had ik het zeldzaam geluk een bizarre maar intense show van haar mee te maken op Tusk festival in Newcastle. Jammer dat haar muzikale output wat stil gevallen is, tegenwoordig is ze vooral actief in de wetenschap en bouwt ze modulaire synths.

Jos Steen - Shoes: Recordings 1984-1992 - CD-R (Jos Steen eigen beheer, ca. 2006)

Jos Steen overleed afgelopen maand. Een eerbetoon laat ik over aan hen die de man van dichtbij gekend hebben, ik heb immers weinig toe te voegen aan de betuigingen die online circuleren. Ik leerde Jos Steen zijn muziek kennen via deze release, die ongetwijfeld het meest geniale catalogusnummer uit mijn collectie bevat: 'SOJNEETS 20'. De CD-R bevat enkel blues, opgenomen tussen 1984 en 1992. Naast covers en herwerkingen van onder andere Big Joe Williams, Son House, Willie Dixon, bevat de compilatie ook eigen nummers. Na het horen van de opener 'Backwater Blues' (1992, opgenomen in Boelwerf, Temse), was ik meteen verkocht. Als percussie element in dit nummer wordt de romp van een enorm zeeschip gebruikt, wat voor een on aardse galm zorgt. 'Remember Me' (1984) zingt Jos, met op de achtergrond een ontstemde piano. Doen we!

Soliman Gamil

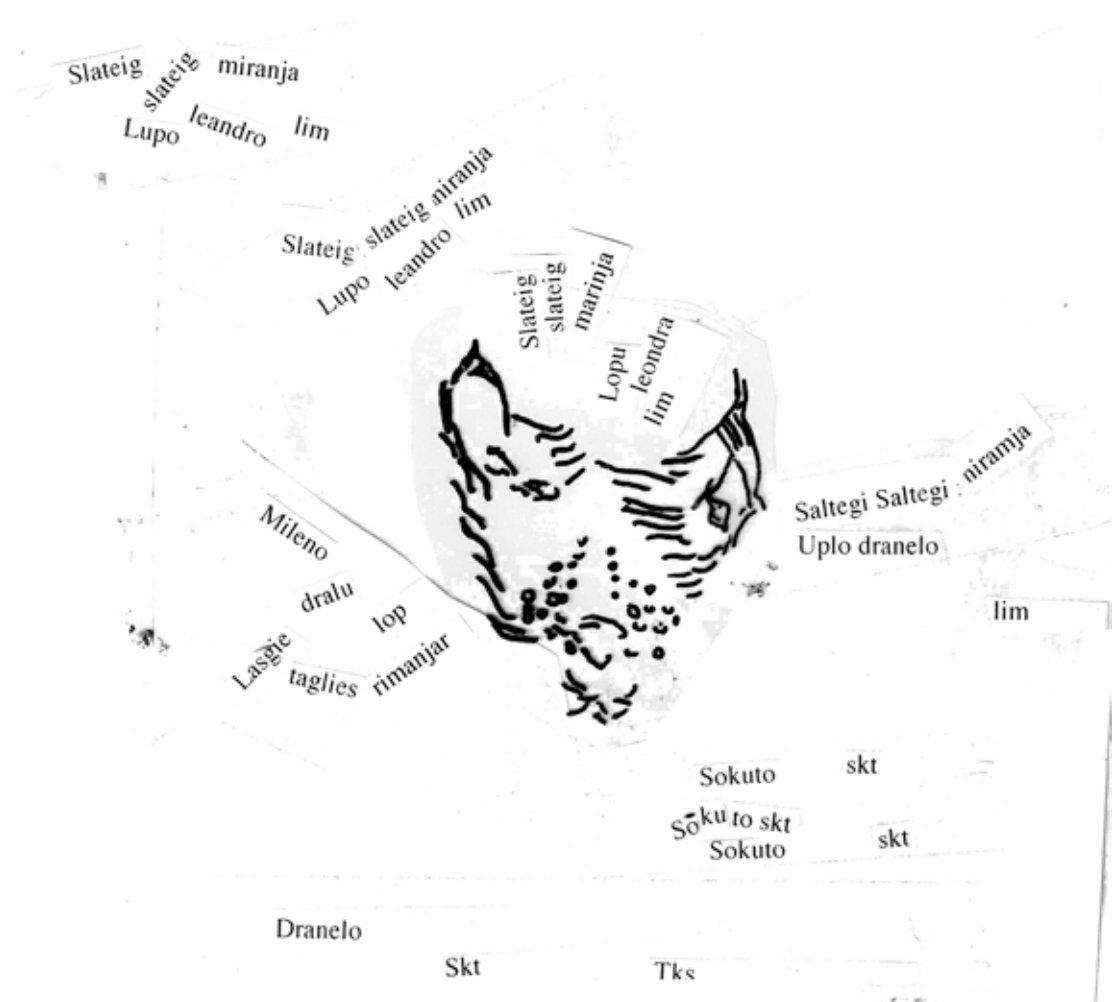
Soliman Gamil is een Egyptische componist, geboren in 1924 in Alexandrië. Hij stierf in 1994. Hij studeerde Arabische muziek in Cairo, maar ook compositie in Europa. Hij componeerde muziek voor theater en film. Zijn muziek is dan ook heel filmisch. Zijn latere LP's werden uitgebracht door het label Touch, natuurlijk met zo'n saai Jon Wozencroft foto, vandaar dit filmpje: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Od3IUW6A8Mk>

MADAGASIKARA

Tsaratanana upla
upla
ies
Madirovalo heelo
Maevatanana

Ampefy Ampefy Saka
Ampefy Vohimary Begogo
ata ata ata ies
oprooe oprooe ata Ejeda
Madirovalo
Tsaratana
una mandoto

AMBOHIMAHAVELONA
Evato Evato
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Tanambe Tanambe Anjiajia
Tanambe Mahambo
Mahambo kie
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En toen ze wakker werd



AFROFUTURISM, PERFORMANCE AND AUTHENTICITY

"Playin' Mas" in Kool Keith's *Black Elvis / Lost in Space*



Today, some white youngsters who are fond of rap imitate their black idols' speech and dress to such an extent that it becomes a kind of racial passing. A century ago, this type of identification would have been unthinkable. Except for comic effect, white people did not usually pretend to be black. The reverse was much more common, as society was racially segregated and favoured whites. When a person of African American ancestry was able to convince the world that he was white, his prospects improved substantially. But what about the *future* of race and its performance? Well, just listen close to Kool Keith, whose 1999 album *Black Elvis / Lost in Space* presents an Afrofuturist perspective on the times before us.¹ - Stefan Hopmans

While performing under assumed names is common practice among hip-hop artists (Hess 301), Kool Keith is unique in his extensive construction of greatly differing personae. On his official website, he lists well over a hundred, ranging from Dr. Sperm through Reverend Tom to Exotron Geiger Counter One Gama Plus Sequencer. Many of these appear only once, supposedly for humorous effects. In the liner notes of his other 1999 LP, *First Come First Served*, for example, he calls himself Robbie Analog, mockingly alluding to Bobby Digital, which in turn is one of Robert "RZA" Diggs's alter egos. Similarly, in the liner notes of the *Black Elvis / Lost in Space* LP, he refers to himself as Blonde Man and Jimmy Steele for no apparent reason.

In *Livin' Astro*, the music video for one of this album's tracks, too, we find names which are not found anywhere else in his oeuvre. Keith plays four characters who seem to have been created specifically for this promotional film, as they do not appear in the lyrics to this song or elsewhere: the Kid in the Commercial, Light Blue Cop, Lonnie Hendrex and Orange Man. These characters' activities on screen are utterly nonsensical: they are either moving in a way reminiscent of martial arts, aiming a torch at the camera and mouthing into a walkie-talkie, dancing up and down in a basketball outfit, or walking about expressionlessly, carrying large cases. Meanwhile, the album's main persona, the Original Black Elvis, lip-synchs to his rhymes against a backdrop of revolving planets, abstract patterns and animated symbols.

It would be wholly unclear what to make of this spectacle if it was not for part of the chorus of "Livin' Astro," where Keith cites two cable television networks broadcasting music videos: "Flying saucers, spaceships move at warp speed / MTV level three when I fly on BET" ("Livin' Astro"). Elsewhere in the song, the Original Black Elvis raps: "I move with calm and potential / Through instrumentals / Y'all front on BET with slum gold / Driving rentals." This opposition between flying and fronting relates to a question central to hip-hop, namely whether or not an artist is "keeping it real," i.e. whether he is true to himself and his origins (Holmes Smith 348; Weheliye 303). In the spoken introduction to this track, Keith alias the Original Black Elvis claims that he is:

Every morning I wake up
Looking in the mirror
I am the Original Black Elvis
That's right
When you see me
With my wig to the side
Wearing my short leather jacket
Marilyn Monroe on my back
I'm living that life
I'm for real with this
That's what I think about
("Livin' Astro")

This claim is problematic, considering it is made by an entity whose very existence is illusionary and who, moreover, is accompanied by a host of other fictional characters, all originating from the same source. The paradox is solved if we accept the hypothesis that Keith is a performer at heart: by pretending to be someone he is not, Keith stays true to his own, theatrical nature. The last line of the quote shows that Keith himself also reflects on these issues of authenticity and performance. The music video to "Livin' Astro," then, primarily draws attention to itself and therefore to its being an *authentic performance*.

Authenticity is possible only when performance is treated as an end in itself rather than a means by which to achieve something else. This becomes apparent in Keith's interactions with women. When Black Elvis goes on a date with a girl, he does not take her to the cinema or to a fun fair; instead, he takes her to a masquerade party, where they are "Sippin' real smooth wine / Galactic glasses / Wearin' masses" ("Supergalactic Lover"). He clearly does not reject make-believe as such, but when it is used for personal gain, he shows his disapproval. For instance, he compares single mothers who have undergone liposuction and wear wigs in order to find a man willing to provide for them to "Model robots / With mechanical legs / Fake hips / Implants" and calls them "unpure" ("I'm Seein' Robots").

Likewise, Keith criticises other people in the music industry for not having a voice or style of their own: "Fools critics they mimic copy / Sloppy MCs get hurt / You blockhead try to stop me" ("Maxi Curls"). This is not to say that Keith is not indebted to other artists. In fact, there are various instances where he pays tribute to his musical predecessors: he speaks of "Deactivating 1975 music / Old soul" ("Rocket on the Battlefield"), seeks to "Boogie on ya / Like Don Cornelius / On *Soul Train*" ("Maxi Curls") and dresses Black Elvis up in a "Big robe like Marvin Gaye" ("Livin' Astro"). Of course, the very Black Elvis persona is an allusion to an icon in popular culture. What distinguishes him from other artists, however, is that Keith does not imitate his idols: "Disco music / Jazz loops / I ain't tryin' to be you" ("I Don't Play"). According to Rollefson, "he is not just another impersonator without a cause, but an artist who knows something about the histories of authenticity, appropriation, and race in American popular music" (101-2). As a matter of fact, Black Elvis is willing to take a stand against his posing colleagues, declaring that "Our purpose here on this planet is to / Bring you down / If you can evade this evil / you'll be the man" ("Intro").

Keith's most prominent effort to overthrow his foes is not related to music, as we might expect, but to transportation. On various occasions, Keith scolds them for renting or leasing luxury cars, presumably in order to convince others of their riches and overall success in life. His criticism culminates in the bridge of one of the final tracks. Pretending to be a business executive, Keith states that his company "sold a lot of Mercedes-Benzenes and BMWs to the small starving communities / Even as an import / It's just a regular cab in foreign countries / Materialistic for just the ignorant ones only in the United States" ("The Girls Don't Like the Job"). He is not arguing against these cars per se, as he and his alter egos are avid consumers of expensive brands, too. But rather than using them to signal his wealth, Keith seems to see cars as an end in themselves and enjoy them for their own sake, just as he does in the case of performance.

Keith also uses the topos of the car to assert his racial superiority to his rivals by remembering them of the fact that he is "blacker than your used Acura / That's why I laugh at ya" ("Keith Turbo"). Elsewhere, he declares to "rhyme against a million people / Who think they equal / Disguisin' as Jamaican people," while his own "skin is black BET" by nature ("Maxi Curls"). He makes these claims with considerable irony, proving that he can beat his colleagues at their own game. A space-travelling African American, Keith appears to be torn between two worlds: "My three million new fans are white people / Geared to the universe / While black people think the worst" ("Keith Turbo"). In truth, he unites both. As he appropriates sophisticated technology by some understood as "a sort of white magic" (Rollefson 91), Keith becomes a "Bionic black man" ("All the Time") for whom race is but a robe.

Rather than envisioning a "race-free future" (Nelson 1), Keith proposes one in which we can take on any shade at will: in the space of one album, Keith is black, blonde, blue and orange. As a result, race would be rendered meaningless if it was not for the fact that it can be performed. Relying on capes, wigs, glasses and highly expressive aliases, Keith fully explores the performative aspect of identity. Elsewhere in his oeuvre, this has led to conflict: one of Keith's alter egos, Dr. Octagon, is killed by another, Dr. Doom, on two separate occasions. *Black Elvis / Lost in Space*, however, offers a much more hopeful perspective. It draws our attention to the question of authenticity, a major theme for hip-hop artists. Keith's view is at once both inward and outward. Unlike rival rappers, whom he regards as fake, Keith treats his performance as an end in itself, deriving from it a sense of self.

¹ Unless stated otherwise, all quotations are taken from: Kool Keith, *Black Elvis / Lost in Space*. Columbia / Ruffhouse, 1999.

Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism is understood in many different ways. In her introduction to a special issue of *Social Text* dedicated entirely to the exploration of the concept's boundaries, Nelson offers a definition too broad and vague to be of much practical use: according to her, it refers to "African American voices' with 'other stories to tell about culture, technology and things to come'" (9). Evidently, this description immediately begs questions with regard to just *how different* these stories should be when compared to *what baseline*. A more popular definition of Afrofuturism explains it as the African American "signification that appropriates images of advanced technology and a prosthetically- enhanced future" (Dery 136) and may apparently be appropriated itself as well: McLeod writes "alien and/or prosthetically enhanced (cyborg) futures" (341) instead and places considerable stress on alienation and the construction of mythologies. Yaszek, however, remains true to the original and emphasises representing and reclaiming past and future history (298-300). Eager to escape their place at the margins, both globally (i.e. the first- world / third-world opposition) as well as locally (i.e. the white / black divide), "Afrofuturist artists fight these dystopic futures in two related ways. First, they use the vocabulary of science fiction to reconfigure the relations of race, science and technology. [...] Second, Afrofuturist artists disrupt, challenge and otherwise transform those futures with fantastic stories" (Yaszek 301). Of particular pertinence to the interpretation of issues of physical appearance and identity is David's view on the Afrofuturist dichotomy between the body and soul: "Afrofuturist thought posits a reconciliation between an imagined disembodied, identity-free future and the embodied identity-specific past and present" (697) by envisaging a future in which blackness continues to render meaning. Here he observes a connection between present-day African American artistic expressions on the one hand and an age-old cultural tradition on the other:

Contemporary black artists now possess a relative freedom to 'play mas' with identity, which refers to an Afro-Caribbean cultural retention linked to annual Carnival celebrations, in which revelers don masks and costumes to participate in the festivities. To 'play mas' affords the carnival reveler the mobility to shift personae in ways that counteract the limitations of identity imposed by the hegemonic gaze of race, gender, class, sexuality, and religion. (David 697)

Even though plenty of music critics have testified to the presence of science fiction in Keith's work, none of them have pointed at the Afrofuturist implications. Scholars of Afrofuturism, on the other hand, have devoted most of their attention to literary works, even though Afrofuturism may be "most prominent in music" (Rollefson 86)¹. To date, Rollefson remains alone in acknowledging the significance of Kool Keith's *Black Elvis / Lost in Space*, interpreting the chief persona that Keith assumes as an Afrofuturist synthesis:

Keith's brilliant full-circle formulation of Black Elvis echoes the double negative of Gilroy's anti-anti-essentialism. The figure of Black Elvis simultaneously critiques a reified essential black masculinity while maintaining that an anti-essentialist argument runs the risk of freeing Elvis's appropriation – and white appropriation at large – from criticism. (Rollefson 101)

¹ The pioneer of Afrofuturism in music is undoubtedly Sun Ra, but also Parliament-Funkadelic, Ornette Coleman and Herbie Hancock a.o. made significant contributions.

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 verdampen de uren als okselzweet...

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